



24th NATIONAL VETERANS WHEELCHAIR GAMES

Gateway to Victory

Gearing Up For The Games

Wheelchair Games Will Cap An Amazing Year for Local Athlete

For Jim Spencer of Sullivan, Mo., it has been a year of achievements and accolades. He was named by the St. Louis Wheelchair Athletic Association as its 2003-2004 Wheelchair Athlete of the Year. He was also chosen to be handed the torch to officially begin the 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games in June. On top of that, Spencer was among the local athletes nominated to carry the Olympic torch as it comes through St. Louis on its way to Greece. To receive all these honors in one year is amazing - to have them occur within your first year of competing in wheelchair sports is truly remarkable.

Spencer is a U.S. Navy veteran. In 1976, at the age of 20, he was involved in a serious hayride accident that left him a paraplegic. Although he was active in sports when he was young, playing football, basketball and baseball, it wasn't until last year that Spencer became involved in wheelchair competition.

"It wasn't that I wasn't interested before then," Spencer says. "It was just that I was running my own business for a while and I just didn't have the time."

But when he started to experience health problems due to diabetes, Spencer's doctor strongly



recommended that he start an exercise program. During that time, his recreation therapist, Jennifer Hahn, began encouraging him to compete in the 2003 National Veterans Wheelchair Games that were coming up in Long Beach.

Months before the 2003 Games, Spencer joined the St. Louis Wheelchair Athletic Association and competed in a few of the local

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The 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games "Gateway to Victory"

By now you've heard that St. Louis will be the host for the 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games June 15 -19. Sponsored by the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Paralyzed Veterans of America (PVA), the Games are the largest wheelchair sports event in the world. More than 500 athletes from across the country, Puerto Rico and Great Britain will participate in this year's Games, hosted by the St. Louis VA Medical Center and the PVA Gateway Chapter.

With only a couple of months until the Opening Ceremonies, preparations are in full swing and

final arrangements are being nailed down in order to put on the best Games ever. It is a tremendous undertaking and it will require the total commitment of the VA community to make the 2004 Games a great success. More than 2,500 volunteers are needed for the events. If you haven't volunteered your services yet, now is the time to do so. If you have already volunteered; recruit your spouse, your kids or your friends to join you. There are still several committees and events in need of volunteers.

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Amazing Year for Local Athlete

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competitions. But those competitions were nothing compared to what he experienced in Long Beach.

“It was unbelievable,” Spencer says. “Being there for the opening ceremonies and seeing all the athletes was amazing. There were over 600 athletes at those Games. It was the most fun I’ve had in my life. There was just something to do there all the time.”

But Spencer wasn’t there to just have fun. He was there to compete. Entered in the maximum number of five events, he surprised everyone with his results. He took the gold in the 100 and 1,500-meter track events. He won another gold medal in the wheelchair slalom. He followed that up by winning a silver medal in the 100-yard backstroke swimming competition. He then came in 8th in the 10K handcycling event.

It was Spencer’s amazing showing at the Games, along with his work with the St. Louis Wheelchair Athletics Association, that resulted in him being named the Association’s Athlete of the Year for 2003 –2004 and his nomination to be the athlete carrying the torch to open the 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games on June 15th. His work with the Gateway Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America, led to his nomination to carry the Olympic torch when it comes through St. Louis.

“That will be a huge thrill,” Spencer says. “But the Olympic torch relay takes place the same week as the Wheelchair Games. I have to make sure it doesn’t conflict with my schedule of events.”

Clearly, Jim Spencer is already focusing on this year’s Games. His goal this year is to be invited to compete in the “Super G,” a wheelchair slalom competition in which only the best athletes in each class are invited to compete. Despite winning the gold medal in slalom last year, he was ineligible for a Super G invitation because he was a first-time participant. This year, that changes as he enters his events in the “masters” division.

Like many local wheelchair athletes, Spencer’s success has been the result of a lot of hard work. Those results have

not only been seen in competition, but also in his health. He has lost weight and his diabetes is now under control. So much so, he doesn’t need to take his medication anymore.

Spencer is happy that the 24th National Veteran Wheelchair Games are being held in St. Louis. He looks forward to the opportunity to compete in front of his family and friends. When asked if he thought that all the recent accolades will put added pressure on him, he replied, “I’ve worked very hard to get to this point. My plan is to just give it my all.”



(Front: left to right) Harold Brakefield, Marvin Foster (Back: left to right) Carol Meyer, Chester Spangler and Brenda Salger Not in photo: Becky Ballard

Carol Meyer and Brenda Salger, co-chairs of this year’s Motor Rally for 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games, traveled to the St. Louis Zoo for a mock trial. Accompanying them were Becky Ballard, Chester Spangler and veterans Harold Brakefield and Marvin Foster, both non-participants in the motor rally.

24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games

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If you are unable to donate your time but would still like to help, there are other ways you can contribute to making the St. Louis Games successful. One major fundraising effort underway is the Veterans Path of Honor. The Path of Honor will be

constructed with commemorative bricks that border the walkway to and around the flagpole in front of Building 1 on the historic campus of the St. Louis VA Medical Center at Jefferson Barracks. Individuals or families can purchase a standard (4'x 8') brick with a \$35 donation, and organizations or companies can purchase a larger brick (8'x 8') for \$125. Every brick will be laser etched

with your veteran's name, military branch or war/military era and dates of service. All of the proceeds from the path will go to the 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games. Construction on the path is set to begin soon; ***to order your brick call Mary Driskill, (314) 894-6601 today.*** It is an easy way to honor a veteran while contributing to the Games.

Those competing in the Games are all veterans who served and sacrificed for the freedoms we enjoy everyday. Now it is our turn to serve. Please volunteer your time and/or make a donation to the Games. To find out how you can get involved, visit www.va.gov/stlouis and click on the 2004 National Veterans Wheelchair Games information link. There you will find information on how to volunteer and an order form for the Path of Honor. With everyone's help, the 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games will be the Gateway to Victory for the athletes, staff and volunteers alike.

Trivia Night Turnout Answers the Question: Are You Ready for Some Trivia?

What event provided an evening of fun, laughs and camaraderie all in the name of supporting the 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games? The answer is the St. Louis VA Trivia Night held February 28, 2004, at Jefferson Barracks.

More than 250 VA employees, their families and friends racked their brains and tested their knowledge on a wide mix of topics ranging from music and entertainment to math and science. First place and the \$100 cash prize went to a mystery team that identified themselves only as "professional trivia players." Second place and \$50, went to the team of friends and family of Becky Ballard, Occupational Therapist, for Spinal Chord Injury Service Line. Third place and \$25 went to the team of friends and family of Amy Will, Recreation Therapist, for Spinal Chord Injury Service Line. Congratulations to all the winning teams – you really know your trivia!

The night also featured a silent auction where nearly \$1,500 was raised on items such as a \$50 gift certificate to Mike Shannon's restaurant, numerous gift certificates to other local restaurants, a cooler filled with assorted beverages, a basket full of doggie treats and goodies, a movie night basket, and many more wonderful items. However, the item receiving the most attention, and the largest bid, was an autographed baseball signed by Cardinal great Stan "The Man" Musial, which garnered a winning bid of \$151!

The night resulted in \$5,100 raised for the 2004 National Veterans Wheelchair Games. But more than that, the night showcased the goodwill and bonding experience of what the Games are all about. It is the kind of support and teamwork that the St. Louis VA staff will have on display during the Games and the reason why the 2004 National Veterans Wheelchair Games will be the best Games ever.

2004 — A Summer to Remember

This summer, St. Louis will be celebrating the centennial anniversaries of both the 1904 Olympic Games and the Worlds Fair. As part of Celebrate 2004, St. Louis will be host to many special activities and events. One of the most exciting, competitive and inspirational of these events will be the 2004 National Veterans Wheelchair Games.

The St. Louis VA Medical Center and

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Looking Good While Supporting the Games

Memorabilia for the 24th National Veterans Wheelchair Games is now on sale at both John Cochran and Jefferson Barracks. Choose from a selection of shirts, caps and key chains. All proceeds help fund the 24th Games.

Items are on sale every Friday from 11 am –1 pm in front of the canteen on the Jefferson Barracks campus, and also every Friday from 11 am – 1 pm on the third floor of John Cochran. Items may only be purchased with cash or a check.

Memorabilia Price List

Wheelchair Games Memorabilia

	Price
Short Sleeve Polo Shirt Gold with sewn logo (Committee Members Only)	\$17.00*
Short Sleeve Polo Shirt Teal with sewn logo	\$22.00*
Short Sleeve Polo Shirt Bimini Blue with sewn logo	\$22.00*
Short Sleeve Polo Shirt Grey with sewn logo	\$22.00*
Long Sleeve Polo Shirt Bimini Blue with sewn logo	\$25.00*
Long Sleeve Polo Shirt Grey with sewn logo	\$25.00*
Mock Turtleneck Long Sleeve Khaki with Gateway to Victory	\$18.00*
Mock Turtleneck Long Sleeve Blue with Gateway to Victory	\$18.00*
Sweatshirt Black with sewn logo	\$25.00
Sweatshirt Grey with sewn logo	\$25.00
Screen Printed T shirt White with /silk screen logo	\$10.00**
Throw Blanket with sewn logo	\$22.00
Baseball Style Cap Khaki with sewn logo	\$10.00
Gateway to Victory Logo Pins	\$ 3.00
Gateway to Victory Arch Key Chain	\$ 3.50
Gateway to Victory Balloon-Steamboat Key Chain	\$ 3.50
Water Bottle Covers with one color logo	\$ 3.50

*Prices for polo shirts and turtle necks are for S-XL
\$2.00 more for 2X-3X \$4.00 more for 4X-5X

**Prices for T shirts are for S-3X
\$2.00 more for 4X-5X

To Order, Contact:
Ruth Hunter – JC extension 7676

For more information visit our web sites at
www.va.gov/stlouis or www.wheelchairgames.org

Summer to Remember

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the Gateway Chapter of Paralyzed Veterans of America will be this year's host to the Games. For five days, and in 16 events plus two exhibitions, more than 500 veterans will be on hand to compete in the individual sports of archery, bowling, table tennis, weightlifting, swimming, and track and field. Athletes will also compete in the team sports of basketball, power soccer, quad rugby, and softball.

The events and activities will take place throughout the St. Louis area at venues such as: America's Center, the Edward Jones Dome, Forest Park and the St. Louis Zoo. The best part is that admission is free to every event.

In its long history of being a great sports town, St. Louis has always embraced athletes who demonstrate heart and determination. During this one week in June, see what heart and determination truly means and witness the excitement of wheelchair sports. These veterans are truly athletes in every sense of the word. Show your support by coming out to cheer or volunteer to assist these courageous and amazing athletes. Let's make it a summer to remember for these remarkable men and women.



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